Money, Understanding Asked

Legislator Claims S.U. 'Smoke Screen'

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — State Board of Education President Enoch Nix was obscuring the real issues when he suggested Southern University's New Orleans branch might be closed as a solution to campus turmoil, a black state legislator says.

"It is unfortunate," Rep. Alphonse Jackson of Shreveport said Monday, "that the state board president is so insensitive to the growing problems to throw up a smoke screen to divert the board from dealing with the real problems."

What is needed, Jackson said, is more money and some understanding and sensitivity toward Southern's role in the state's educational process.

JACKSON'S observations came at a news conference, during which it was announced two Southern faculty members fired following three weeks of campus turmoil had asked a federal court to get their jobs back.

Dr. Joseph Johnson, who headed Southern's physics department, and George T. Baker Jr., an assistant professor of electrical engineering, were fired Nov. 17—the day after students and police clashed on Southern's Baton Rouge campus. Two young blacks were killed.

The 12-member committee investigating the confrontation headed by Atty. Gen. William Guste, was in recess until Wednesday.

The panel, which has concentrated on the deaths of the students, Denver A. Smith and Leonard Douglas Brown, was scheduled to hear student witnesses for the first time beginning at 10 a.m. Wednesday.

EAST BATON ROUGE Parish Sheriff Al Amiss and Col. Donald Thibodeaux, the superintendent of state police, were lined up to testify, too. In addition, the committee expected to hear a report from its ballistics subcommittee.

Guste's panel already has determined the two students died from wounds caused by pellets from a shotgun and that police tossed the first teargas canister — touching off the clash.

Nix, over the weekend, suggested Southern's smaller New Orleans branch might be closed—if students don't return to their classes.

The Baton Rouge campus has been closed until Jan. 3, but administrators have tried, with little success, to hold classes in New Orleans.

JACKSON said the move by students to get more of a voice in the administration of the school is "one we can all applaud if we're objective about it."

He rejected the idea that the problems at the university could be solved by merging it with predominantly white Louisiana State University.

"Because of their uniqueness," he said, "they perform special roles that will be needed far into the future."

Johnson and Baker, in the lawsuits financed by the National Education Association, complained they had been fired without hearings and without being informed of the charge against them.

SOUTHERN President G. Leon Netterville alleged the two had encouraged students to protest.

Jackson joined Dr. Helen Wise of State College, Pa., president-elect of the NEA, in announcing the legal action. The first term lawmaker is an official of the Louisiana Education Association.